

The Home Missionary, vol. 6

ESM

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Growth is the process of development by which that which is immature advances toward a state of perfection. Growth is as much a possibility and a necessity of spiritual life as a physical life. The spiritual life begins with a birth,-the “new birth.” The individual is then a babe in Christ. Were he always to remain a babe he could not become a soldier of the cross, enduring hardness in the service of his Master. He could not partake of the strong meat which, with the more simple “milk of the word,” is provided in the Gospel of Christ. From the condition of a babe, he must pass to that of the full stature of manhood in Christ; and this can only be done by growth.*HOMI November 1894, page 243.1*

What are the essentials to growth? Almost anyone can tell what is necessary to the growth of a plant, but scarcely anyone seems to understand what is necessary to development as a Christian. Yet it needs no greater effort to know what is necessary in the one case than in the other. A Christian is but a plant in the garden of the Lord; and spiritual plants, like any other plants, need plenty of water, good soil, and sunlight.*HOMI November 1894, page 243.2*

All these the Lord has provided for His garden, and it only remains for His plants to assimilate what they find. But there is a strange perversity about these plants of the human kind, that is not seen in the physical world. The Lord to the prophet Jeremiah complains of His people of old that though He had planted them “a noble vine, wholly a right seed,” yet they had “turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine;” and thus it is with many now who have enjoyed like privileges. There is no fault in the provision that God has made; but there is an evil principle which finds its way into the plant and perverts its nature, causing degeneracy and ultimate loss of all that is noble and good.*HOMI November 1894, page 243.3*

It is the nature of a plant to turn towards the sun; but in God's spiritual garden are seen some plants that try to grow in another way. There are some that try to grow by something inherent in themselves. Of course, no growth can be attained in this way. Imagine a plant trying to make itself grow, exerting itself,-if it could be capable of exertion-to become higher and stronger and to strike its roots more deeply into the soil! The idea is absurd; yet this is what many people think they must do in order to grow as Christians. But Christ said, "Which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit?" *Luke 12:25*. Who would think of exerting himself in order to grow physically? It is true that exercise influences growth, but it is not the cause of growth, nor is there anything that man can do to cause it. The principle of development is in every human organization by nature, and asserts itself as a principle of all living beings; and all that man can do is to secure those conditions within which this principle can operate to the best good of the individual. So it is in the spiritual world. The principle of growth is implanted by God at the new birth, and only needs right conditions to cause the babe in Christ to grow up to the full stature of Christian manhood. Man can interfere with this principle, and repress it, but he cannot create it. But the devil, who understands all this, continually sets men to work to try to make themselves grow by exertion. He would have men think that by taking thought and doing a large amount of good works they can add a cubit to their stature in Christ. And men try this plan, as they have been doing for ages in the past, and keep trying it until they find that it does not work. They find that after years of such efforts, they are not any stronger Christians than they were at the start, nor reach higher up into the spiritual atmosphere of heaven. Then they become discouraged, and the devil, who knew what the result would be, comes and tempts them, and finds them ready to fall an easy prey to his devices.*HOMI November 1894, page 244.1*

But there is no impossibility in the way of Christian growth. The difficulty was, they did not understand the nature of that growth. They did not know the conditions under which alone it could take place. They were not instructed by that which God has revealed in His word and in nature. A plant grows and reaches up and becomes stronger without any exertion on its own part. It simply looks to the sun. It feels the vivifying influence of its rays, and reaches up

toward the source from which they come. The whole process is simply an effort to get nearer to the source of its life. In the soil it finds water and the various elements that enter into its composition as a plant, and the principle of assimilation within it, which it has so long as it looks at the sun, draws up the substances through the roots and into the stem and leaves. The plant simply lets the process go on according to this law of assimilation which its Creator gave it.*HOMI November 1894, page 244.2*

So it must be with the plants in the heavenly garden. They cannot grow by looking at themselves; they cannot grow by looking at other plants around them. They must look at the sun. Neither must they exert themselves to assimilate that which is necessary to build them up and make them strong, but simply *let* the process of assimilation go on according to the “law of the Spirit of life” that has been put within them. “*Let* this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus,” is the exhortation that is given us. It will be in us if we will let it. All God wants of any person is to *let* him work in him.*HOMI November 1894, page 244.3*

Man is continually doing something to hinder God’s work. He is continually putting self in God’s way. He refuses to submit his will to God’s will. And this is all the difficulty about living the Christian life. It is not a difficulty of performing works, but the difficulty of making the right choice, of yielding to God and not to self, of looking to Christ and not to something else, and of *letting* His mind and His spirit be in us. He is our Sun, the “Sun of Righteousness.” *Malachi 4:3*. If we will look steadfastly at Him as the plant does at the sun that shines in the heavens, if we will make it our constant effort to turn toward him as the plant does to the source of its life, and to reach up more and more toward the brightness of his face, we shall experience no difficulty in obtaining the full measure of growth that we desire.*HOMI November 1894, page 244.4*

But we need not expect to realize the fact that we are growing, any more than we can realize that we are growing physically by trying to note changes in our stature from day to day. If the plant should turn its head away from the sun to look at itself and see how fast it was growing, it would soon cease to grow; and just so with the Christian. When he tries to see himself growing spiritually he is taking one of

the most effective means to stop his growth entirely.*HOMI November 1894, page 244.5*

There is no cause for discouragement therefore in the fact we do not at any time realize this process of growth. It is taking place just as truly as it takes place in the physical world, and we need not make the outcome a matter of anxious concern. The outcome will be that which the apostle Paul describes in his letter to the Ephesians, for whom he prayed that they might be strengthened by the inward presence of the Spirit, "that ye, been rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the length and breadth and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be *filled with all the fullness of God.*" *Ephesians 3:19.HOMI November 1894, page 244.6*

We are not told to grow in the knowledge of self or the knowledge of our sinfulness or that of our neighbors, but "in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." *2 Peter 3:18.* We cannot know His grace and all His attributes unless we see them; and we cannot see them unless we look to him. E. J. WAGGONER.*HOMI November 1894, page 245.1*

